

Best Management Practices

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



Barn owl

Tyto alba

Common name • Barn owl

Scientific name • *Tyto alba*

State status • Endangered

Ecology

Barn owls are nearly world-wide in their distribution and present on every continent except Antarctica. They nest throughout appropriate grassland habitats in Missouri except in the Ozarks. They are most common in the Bootheel and in the Osage Plains in west central Missouri. Barn owls prefer warm climates and grasslands. Barn owls rely on open fields for hunting, which they do at night. They prey mainly on small microtine rodents and rats. Barn owls live two to four years on average, and they usually breed once or twice per year. Normally, breeding begins in March, and females lay four to seven eggs, which hatch starting in May. Barn owls use both natural and man-made nesting sites, including tree cavities, barns, silos, abandoned and occupied buildings and chimneys. Barn owls may be preyed upon by raccoons or great horned owls.

Reasons for Decline

As agriculture opened up the eastern forests of the United States in the 1800s, the range of the barn owl expanded. However, as plowing and urbanization of grasslands continued, populations declined, especially in the Midwest. In addition, large numbers of barn owls are killed every year by vehicle collisions in high concentration areas, mostly in other states.

Specific Recommendations

Barn owls benefit from restricting human use of foraging habitat and maintenance of cropland and grasslands, as do other grassland species.

→ Native grasslands should be maintained whenever possible.

→ Any open areas such as pastures, cropland, native grass plantings and marshes should be maintained.

→ Use of insecticides and rodenticides in nesting areas should be minimized: Barn owls can act as a natural, biological control of unwanted rodents.

→ If available nesting structures must be removed, barn owl nest boxes should be placed in other areas to provide alternative nesting sites.

Information Contacts

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